

S.The Signal

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■ Contact a CEPU Official:

LEN COOPER
Branch Secretary
0438 389 302

JOHN ELLERY
Assist Secretary
0419 823 580

SUE RILEY
Industrial Officer
0439 762 455

**COMMUNICATIONS
WORKERS' UNION**

Ground Floor
139 Queensberry Street
Carlton South 3053

Ph: 03 9349 4411

Fax : 03 9349 3488

Email

cdtsvic@cwu.asn.au



TELSTRA CREATING "SKILLS DRAIN" SAYS UNION

The CWU has expressed alarm at Telstra's plan to send another raft of Australian jobs off-shore, this time ones that involve high-level network-related functions.

Telstra has confirmed that it is proposing to outsource about 280 Telstra jobs and an unspecified number of agency jobs from the Network Applications and Services (NAS) area. The move is part of "Project Evolution" which Telstra says aims to streamline and realign functions and services within NAS.

In particular, Telstra is planning to transfer a range of Next Generation Operations functions performed for Telstra International customers to the company's assurance centre in Hong Kong.

The bulk of these changes would occur in the first half of next year but the full outsourcing process is expected to spread over three years.

CWU Divisional Secretary Dan Dwyer said that the work being off-shored was highly skilled and performed by senior technicians.

"This move represents a double blow to the local industry and to our economy," he said. "Not only do Telstra employees in Australia stand to lose work but important skills will leave the country."

"Telstra should be helping build our national skill base, not creating a skill drain by off-shoring."

Telstra has indicated that 50 new positions will be created as part of the plan and that employees facing redundancy will have the first chance to secure these jobs. Training to allow such redeployment is also being made available.

It remains to be seen, though, whether all 280 employees will find new roles in the company. Past experience suggests this is unlikely.

The CWU has met with Telstra to discuss the proposal and the company has undertaken to provide the union with more details of the functions and staff which will be affected.

The union nationally is currently considering its further response to this proposal. In the meantime, affected members are urged to contact their state branches.

Seasons Greetings

We take this opportunity to wish you a peaceful, happy Festive Season and New Year.

The Branch Office will be closed from 12 Noon Wednesday 21st December to Wednesday 4th January 2012.

As always, in an emergency, officials will be contactable by mobile.

The Branch Office phones will be on message bank, so if your enquiry is not urgent please leave a message as the message bank is checked daily. We'll get back to you as soon as possible.

FAIR GO FOXTEL: SUBBIES RAMP UP CAMPAIGN

Sub-contractors engaged in Foxtel work are ramping up their campaign.

Subbies meeting in NSW voted unanimously to take action designed to highlight their claims for better rates and conditions.

They rallied outside Foxtel's Sydney offices on Tuesday 13 December to protest against the unfair contracts offered by Foxtel prime contractors Downer and BSA.

Similar action took place on the 14th in Victoria with other states scheduled to follow. The Victorians rallied again outside Foxtel on December 19th.

All Foxtel subbies are urged to get involved in this important campaign aimed at lifting conditions in this growing sector of the telecommunications industry.

For more information go to the campaign website at www.fairgofoxtel.com.au or contact the relevant state branch of the CWU.

TELSTRA AWARD MODERNISATION

Telstra's application to cancel all the current Telstra enterprise awards was heard by a full bench of Fair Work Australia in Melbourne on 5 December.

If Telstra's application is successful, the award that will in future provide the "safety net" for most CWU members in Telstra will be the Telecommunications Services Award 2010 (TSA). As the CWU has

reported before, the conditions in that award are inferior to those in the current Telstra awards in certain key areas.

If Telstra is not successful it is likely that the company and the CWU will be told to sit down and negotiate a new single Telstra award i.e. a modern enterprise award to replace the 11 current awards that cover Telstra employees.

The ACTU appeared at the hearing in support of the CWU and other Telstra unions, arguing that if an enterprise-specific award was not appropriate in Telstra's case it was hard to see when it would be. In this respect the case is shaping up as a test of whether Fair Work Australia will allow any significant number of enterprise awards to continue.

The CWU is hoping for a decision from FWA before Xmas. Members will be advised of developments.

CWU CONFERENCE MAKES RECRUITMENT A PRIORITY

The CWU Divisional Conference has committed the union to a major recruitment effort in 2012.

The Divisional Conference meeting, held in Sydney on 30 November- 1 December, unanimously supported a proposal for the union to make more funds available for building membership.

In the first instance, a position will be created at the national level for someone who has both a proven track record of successful recruitment and is able to teach recruitment skills.

Further resources may be committed at branch level in the next stage of the initiative.

With enterprise bargaining on the agenda next year in the two largest telecommunications carriers – Telstra and Optus – it is critical for the CWU and its current members that we maximise our strength in these companies.

At the same time the ramping up of the National Broadband Network (NBN) roll-out during 2012 will present the CWU with further recruitment and organising challenges.

Current members have a role to play in building the union in these areas. If there are non-members where you work, it's time someone explained to them that in unity is strength. Why not you? Contact the union office for advice and support

NO GREEN LIGHT YET FOR NBN AGREEMENT

The clock is ticking for the agreement between Telstra and NBN Co with the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) still to sign off on aspects of the deal.

Under the terms of the Definitive Agreements reached between Telstra, NBN Co and the Commonwealth earlier this year, the ACCC has until 20 December to approve specific elements of the deal (i.e. Telstra's Structural Separation Undertaking - SSU).

It now seems unlikely that requirement will be met.

Industry and ACCC criticisms of Telstra's first SSU have led to renegotiation of the access

arrangements that will be put in place during the transition to the NBN world. To date, however, no agreement has been reached.

Meanwhile, in a related development, service providers have expressed major concerns about the terms on which NBN Co is proposing to give them access to its network despite major concession by the company on the proposed structure and level of its prices.

Industry push-back in these two areas poses a threat to the NBN timetable and so to the overall economics of the project. Delay is costly.

Both NBN Co and the federal government will be hoping that these issues can be resolved before the New Year and without Telstra's having to take a revised version of its SSU back to a shareholders meeting for approval.

ALP COMMITS TO STRONGER WORKER PROTECTIONS

Unions have succeeded in strengthening the Australian Labor Party's industrial relations policy, especially in relation to access to arbitration.

The recently held ALP National Conference adopted changes to the party platform designed to allow a more activist role for Fair Work Australia in settling bargaining disputes.

Recent disputes have highlighted the difficulties that employees and their unions face in getting access to arbitration in the course of bargaining. As it stands, the Act only provides for such arbitration in fairly extreme circumstances – such

as Qantas' grounding of its entire fleet.

Unless union action can have an equally dramatic effect it will not trigger FWA intervention. In practice this means that a well resourced and determined employer can hold out indefinitely without ever reaching agreement with employees – as has been seen in the Cochlear dispute.

Of course, policy is one thing; government action is another. With a review of the Fair Work Act scheduled for early next year it remains to be seen whether the ALP platform changes will be translated into changes to the law.

Employers have already signalled they will strongly oppose any extensions of FWA's powers. So the battle lines are already drawn for what will be a major policy contest in 2012.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: STUDY CONFIRMS EFFECTS ON WOMEN WORKERS

A federally-funded study has confirmed what many Australian unionists already know: women workers who suffer abuse at home are unlikely to perform to their full potential in the workplace.

The survey of 3,611 women workers found that nearly a third of them reported having experienced domestic violence at some stage of their lives.

And of those who had such experiences, nearly half said it had affected their ability simply to get to work, let alone their performance on the job.

Once at work, their performance was affected by such factors as tiredness, anxiety and harassment in the form of threatening phone calls. About one in five reported abusive partners actually turning up at their work.

For unions the report lends weight to the argument for special domestic violence leave provisions to be built into enterprise agreements.

And for employers, the findings should come as a wake-up call about the impacts of family violence on productivity. An Access Economics study has put the 2002-03 cost of lost productivity due to domestic violence at \$500 million.

It is in the interests of both employees and companies that this issue be addressed and that appropriate steps are taken to help women subject to domestic violence to stay and function effectively in the workplace.

LEN COOPER Branch Secretary

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